



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Mr Bill Hansberry
Submitting as a: Teacher
State: SA

Summary

Structured, synthetic phonics taught within a framework of explicit, direct instruction across all Australian schools will improve literacy results rapidly. A response to intervention model must be implemented and Universities must do better in skilling teachers in teaching reading and spelling. The evidence must combat Ideology before our declining standards will improve.

Main submission

Australia's declining literacy (reading) results are a direct result of reading being taught incorrectly and not in line with the research findings from three international inquiries into the teaching of reading from the US, the U.K. and our own inquiry. The evidence is conclusive that structured synthetic phonics taught through explicit and direct instruction is getting the best results across as the globe. Sadly in Australia, every recommendation of our own inquiry into the teaching of reading (2002) was ignored and ideology has remained the driving force in determining how reading and spelling is taught in schools.

Currently, schools are not receiving strong leadership from authorities around evidence based programs for teaching reading and supporting students with specific learning difficulties. Schools continue to sink millions of taxpayers' dollars into well marketed programs like Reading Recovery, Fountis and Pinnell and Arrowsmith that are either based on a scientifically flawed theory of reading development or applications of neuroscience that are yet to be proven. Our teachers cannot be blamed as their undergraduate teacher training continues to poorly equip them with information about teaching reading and spelling. Our universities are producing ill informed consumers who lack the grounding in scientific method to understand the difference between programs with an evidence base and anecdote dressed up as evidence.

We need a focus on structured synthetic phonics in all Australian schools as well as a three tiered Response to Intervention model that ensures that all students are receiving evidence based classroom instruction (refer to Bentleigh West Primary School in Victoria or Robina State School in Qld). For struggling students, tier 2 and 3 withdrawal programs with specially trained multisensory teachers must be provided in small groups (tier 2) and intensive intervention 1:1 or in pairs (tier 3). These remediation approaches must focus on phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, phonics, overlearning, revision and practice until the foundation skills for decoding and efficient word recognition are established.

The misguided focus on enquiry learning has seen basic skills decline in Australia and explicit, direct instruction has fallen by the wayside.

I am a self employed specialist dyslexia teacher with a thriving practice providing remediation programs that schools cannot yet provide. Writing these sorts of submissions will eventually put me out of business.